

completed. He was fortunate in his collaborators, and the work is a worthy tribute to his memory.

E. GREBENIK

ABORTION

Ferris, Paul. *The Nameless: Abortion in Britain Today*. London, 1966. Hutchinson. Pp. 173. Price 21s.

MR. FERRIS HAS elicited viewpoints from many sources and confirmed that illegal termination of pregnancy is widespread and that the law is largely ineffective. He takes the view that relaxation of present restrictions is called for but that even more important than changing the law is changing the attitude of doctors: "A change in the law needs to be accompanied by a change of heart among doctors, who say, reasonably enough, that they see no reason why they should be obliged to do something they find distasteful." Doctors in fact, seem to be satisfied with the law as it is. For example, out of sixty-eight gynaecologists whose views were elicited in the Birmingham district, fifty-five gave approval to the statement that they regarded the present state of the law as satisfactory, while ten more gave qualified approval to that viewpoint.

Since this book was written, the unanimous report of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has affirmed that current medical practice is not seriously hampered by the present legal position and that there is advantage in leaving things as they are in that gynaecologists are free to act in what they consider the best interests of each individual patient. This means that abortion can only be legally performed if the health or life of the mother would be endangered by continuing pregnancy. But as Mr. Ferris agrees, many abortion reformers believe that women should be free to have an abortion for any reason and it is clear that legislative proposals introduced into Parliament are intended to pave the way towards that end. The President of the Abortion Law Reform Association said in 1963 that he thought the legal ban should be removed altogether from medical abortion so long as it was performed in time to be medically safe. Japan, Russia and many countries in eastern Europe have gone a long

way in that direction, but as Mr. Ferris admits, none of these countries is happy about it. He quotes the ethical code of health workers in Yugoslavia that "a health worker should regard abortion as biologically, medically, psychologically and sociologically harmful". In Hungary, we are told, committees must be consulted but have to give permission, so that all they can do is to warn of the possible effect on health. He might have added that the Japanese Minister of Welfare and the Russian Minister of Health have admitted and deplored the harm to female health which follows in the wake of legalized abortion. Mr. Ferris skates lightly over such disadvantages, saying that there is not enough evidence either way and that doctors can choose what they want to support their case. Surely where serious invalidism and shortening of life may be concerned, one is not entitled to leave the matter there.

The Council of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists deny that abortion is a trivial operation free from risk and point out that operative risks of mortality in Scandinavia for legalized abortion varied from 0.9 to 3.5 per thousand cases and that even Denmark with a rate of 0.7 is three times as high as the present rate of maternal mortality (including abortions) for England and Wales. Their report adds that serious complications occur in not less than 3 per cent of cases of legalized abortion induced by experts under modern conditions and morbidity rates as high as 15 per cent are reported; sterility can also result. When wanted pregnancies follow a previously induced abortion they are liable to be complicated by miscarriage and other serious accidents. The incidence of serious psychiatric sequelae is variously reported as being between 9 and 59 per cent. The doubts and misgivings reported from every country where legalized abortion has been extensively practised arise from evidence of widespread harm to female health, yet such primarily relevant facts have gone practically unmentioned in the debates in Parliament.

In these circumstances it is necessary to stress the recommendation of the Royal College that abortion is a second best treatment and that efforts should be directed to ensure that the unwanted or harmful pregnancy does not occur.

It is here that facilities for voluntary sterilization being promoted by the Simon Population Trust can make an important contribution. Vasectomy, unlike abortion, is a trivial operation which does not destroy life nor injure health and according to recent evidence is reversible in nine cases out of ten if a skilful surgeon is available. The flood of applications from husbands which followed the announcement of the Simon Trust project, suggests that, as has been shown in India and the USA, voluntary sterilization in this country may prove to be highly acceptable.

HERBERT BREWER

CHILD CARE

Kellmer Pringle, M. L. (Editor). *Investment in Children: A Symposium*. London, 1965. Longmans. Pp. xi+180. Price 12s. 6d.

THE NATIONAL BUREAU for Co-operation in Child Care was set up in 1962, its aims being to minimize ignorance of child development by encouraging research, by attempting to co-ordinate work that was in progress and to facilitate useful co-operation between all agencies concerned in child care. This book, with a foreword by Lord Cohen of Birkenhead and an introduction and summary by the Director of the National Bureau, the editor of this publication, is based on the papers that were delivered at the first conference of the Bureau. The theme throughout is "prevention" and the promotion of positive mental, emotional and physical well-being during childhood.

The eight contributors to the Symposium are from the fields of education, psychology, paediatrics and social work. Each discipline is considered from two aspects, (a) theory and policy, and (b) administration and practice. The outstanding chapter is by W. D. Wall; he gives an interesting account of educational institutions and their role from a historical point of view, illustrating the fact that the function of the schools has changed over the years. He stresses that the major aim to-day should be guidance and makes a strong plea that all the services should be centred or concentrated within an educational framework, for the schools are

after all, he argues, in touch with all children for a minimum of ten years.

Other chapters echo the need for a fuller understanding of child development, so that preventative action may be taken where necessary, as well as any treatment that may be required. Throughout the symposium there is a strong emphasis on the need for more integration of the social services that are available and it is also stressed that the help or treatment given should be family, rather than child, centred.

J. M. ROSS

Standing Conference of Societies Registered for Adoption. *Medical Aspects of Child Adoption*. Honorary Editor, **Hilda Lewis**. London, 1966. Pp. 58. Price 5s. Obtainable from Mr. A. Rampton, Gort Lodge, Petersham, Surrey.

"THIS IS A collection of papers which, with the exception of the first, were originally read at conferences organized in recent years by the Standing Conference; they have now been revised and brought up to date by their authors. The first paper is a reprint of an article by the chairman of the Medical Group of the Standing Conference, Dr. Hilda Lewis, who has edited and arranged the other papers in this book. It is hoped that the ground covered is sufficiently wide to be of interest to all interested in the medical aspects of child adoption."

This quotation from the Foreword, written by the Honorary Secretary of the Standing Conference, sums up the nature and purpose of this booklet. It contains some nine papers, ranging from specific topics such as chest conditions, tuberculosis, heart and circulatory disturbances, blood tests and epilepsy, to a consideration of more general aspects such as ante-natal and perinatal factors and neo-natal disorders. Then there is a third group of papers whose scope is wider still: medical responsibility in adoption; adopted children in adolescence; and heredity as it concerns adoption.

While the medical reader may well be most interested in the papers relating to his own speciality, the general reader is likely to find the last-mentioned contributions most stimulating. Dr. Lewis outlines those features of the 1958